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ABSTRACT

This action research study examined the problem of the lack of work placement skills with a focus on time management, and an attitude of indifference on the part of the students. Student in the targeted vocational classroom were exhibiting a lack of preparation for learning that not only interfered with academic achievement but also possible future job performance. The study also reviewed a variety of strategies to improve student learning and students' view of themselves as learners and to develop a higher self-esteem. The probable causes for the lack of work placement skills were: ineffective time management skills, lack of responsibility, poor planning skills, and poor attendance. After reviewing the research literature, these intervention strategies were selected: direct instructions of work placement skills, and direct instruction in the use of time and strategies to improve time management skills. Postintervention data indicated a decrease in work placement skills, little effort to arrive to work on time, arrive at class on time and be prepared for the day's activities. There was little apparent improvement in student responsibility. Seven appendixes are included containing surveys, checklists, the pretest, and posttest. (Contains 33 references.) (GCP)

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IMPROVING WORK SKILLS OF COOPERATIVE WORK STUDENTS THROUGH TIME MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Lori Coon

An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University and SkyLight

Field-Based Master's Program

Chicago, Illinois

May 2002

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Title: Improving work skills of cooperative work/study students through time management strategies.

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Date: May 18, 2002

Abstract

This action research study examined the problem of the lack of work placement skills with a focus on time management, and an attitude of indifference on the part of the students. Students in the targeted vocational classroom were exhibiting a lack of preparation for learning that not only interfered with academic achievement but also possible future job performance. The study also reviewed a variety of strategies to improve student learning and students' view of themselves as learners and to develop a higher self-esteem. Participating in this study were high school cooperative education students in an economically diverse rural community in western Illinois. An examination of the work keys skills assessment given to seniors in 2001 revealed a relationship between missing, late, or incomplete assignments, poor organizational skills, lack of responsibility to be prepared for class, and low grades. Students often arrived to class without needed materials.

The probable causes for the lack of work placement skills were: ineffective time management skills, lack of responsibility, poor planning skills, and poor attendance.

After reviewing the research literature, these intervention strategies were selected: direct instructions of work placement skills, direct instruction in the use of time and strategies to improve time management skills. In addition to these strategies, student conferences, required portfolio, and daily checks of preparedness were incorporated. Analysis of student surveys, scores on the work placement skills assessment, teacher observations, student conferences, scores on the pre/post test, and the career portfolio assessed results of the project.

Postintervention data indicated a decrease in work placement skills, little effort to arrive to work on time, arrive at class on time and be prepared for the day's activities. There was little apparent improvement in student responsibility.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

Problem Statement

The students of the targeted vocational class demonstrated a lack of work readiness and work placement skills. Evidence for the existence of the problem included examinations of the percentage of missing, late, or incomplete assignments, teacher surveys, student surveys, employer surveys, teacher journal entries that described student behavior both in and out of the classroom, and observation checklists.

Local Context

The school district identified in the problem statement was located in West Central Illinois and consisted of a combined junior/senior high school. The district encompassed several communities and covered 185 square miles. There were approximately 300 junior high students and 500 high school students, with 60 full-time instructors, including 5 full-time special education teachers and 4 full-time teacher aides. There was also a full-time social w·:ker and a full-time psychologist devoted to peer helpers, peer tutors, role models, problem solving, as well as other student centered services. Twenty percent of the teachers had a master's degree, while 80 % held a bachelor's degree.

The ethnic composition of the school included 97% Caucasian students, .01% African American students, 1.6% Hispanic students, and 1.6% Asian/Pacific islander students. Class sizes averaged 19 students in the junior high and 17 students in the high school. There was an attendance rate of 96%, 0.6% chronic truancy rate, and a mobility rate of 9% in the junior high and 13% in the high school. The low-income level was 20% in the junior high and 12% for the high school. The district spent an average of $4,981 per student.

The extra programs offered at the school included a free/reduced price breakfast and lunch program, student of the month, service club student of the month, and Tiger Pride cards. Extracurricular activities included band, chorus, sports, drama, yearbook, newspaper, scholastic bowl, peer mentoring support group, Students Against Destructive Decisions, Future Business Leaders of America, band, chorus, student council, cheer-leading, pom pon, drama, scholastic teams, class senates, National Honor Society, Industrial Tech Club, Foreign Language Club, Art Club, Crime Stoppers, Illinois Rivers Project, and Varsity Club. The school was also a member of North Central Association as well as the Illinois High School Association. The school also received The Bright Star Award for the past three years. The school offered a comprehensive program, which included vocational education, English, mathematics, science, foreign language, and physical education as well as advanced college courses and tech prep courses. Over 50% of the students took the college prep program and 65% enrolled in post-secondary institutions. Students selected courses in either the college prep program or the tech prep program. Both programs were intended to prepare students for postsecondary education and/or employment. In addition, the school functioned in a block schedule format (4

block for high school courses and A-B block for junior high mathematics, English, and physical education. This system allowed for teachers to utilize research-based teaching strategies and innovative activities.

The Surrounding Community

In the school district represented, 94% of the households had children in school and 85% of those students rode the bus. Approximately 9% of the households in the district had a poverty income level status. Consequently, 13% of those households had children in the school district. The median household income level was $38,584.

The people of the district experienced a new superintendent in 2001 and a new high school principal in 2001-2002. The administration of the school divided when the new office space was completed in the addition in 2001 a principal, secretary, nurse, and guidance officer moved to the new office space.

The school district is unique because it was a consolidated district located in the middle of cornfields located near the Quad City area. It is predominantly a bedroom community with the majority of the parents commuting to the Quad Cities for employment. One school housed both junior high and high school students. An addition was built in 2001 to separate the junior high students from the high school students by adding an additional 12 classrooms, 2 science labs, and a gymnasium/cafeteria. The district also has 5 elementary schools throughout various locations throughout the district.

The main businesses of the community were farming and agricultural-related services. However, the majority of the parents commuted to the Quad Cities and worked for such companies as John Deere, Case International, car dealers, and hospitals. Only two towns had grocery stores, so most families did their shopping in the Quad Cities.

Several people worked in the various communities in "mom" and "pop" stores, but most commuted to larger towns for employment and shopping needs.

Each of the towns in the district boasted of summer baseball/softball leagues as well as soccer leagues. A local lake offered boating, water skiing, and fishing. There were several libraries that provided reading programs and computer usage to local residents. However, most families had to travel to other communities to enjoy other cultural activities such as museums, movie theaters, and the riverfront.

Within the district there were several churches that covered most denominations. People volunteered in their respective communities as fire fighters, Scout leaders, youth group leaders, booster members, parade coordinators, rodeo coordinators, drill team leaders, 4-H volunteers, and other summer community celebration groups.

National Context

Many employers believe that new job entrants lack many of the basic, problem-solving, teamwork, and communication skills needed to survive in the workplace of the Twenty-first Century. The lack of work placement skills, as shown by low-test scores and work skills assessments, has an adverse effect on students' academic achievement. Within the classroom, students often display a serious lack of responsibility and respect for self and others. Sometimes students arrive late to class and are unprepared for the day's activities. Business people report that the skills most students are lacking when they enter the workforce include attendance, commitment, communication, initiative or drive, responsibility, and teamwork.

Students of the targeted school watch MTV Cribs and believe that to achieve success in life a person needs a lot of money, several cars, and a 14 bedroom home.

These students also believe that a person who earns a moderate income and drives a Ford Escort is nothing. However they do not make the correlation that to achieve the finer things in life one needs the proper workplace skills and academic background to score the better jobs. A person may have the academic background but without the key workplace essentials they may not be hired for the prime jobs. Successfully motivating students would ultimately promote positive transfer into their adult lives. Therefore the mission of all teachers should be to ensure that students are afforded equal access to business knowledge and skills whereby creating an equal opportunity for success in life (Cochrane, 2001). National business standards have been created and should be followed by vocational teachers to raise the level of competency required of students and of entry-level employees. According to the Policies Commission for Business and Economic Education (2001), business teachers should consider themselves as continual learners and systematically keep up with changing technology. In this fast-paced, changing world, business educators should implement a professional development plan designed to keep them current in business content and instructional delivery systems.

Several factors attest to the growing concern about the occupational literacy levels of workers. These factors include deficient academic levels of entry-level employees, the changing nature of the work force in society, and economic problems resulting from workers' inability to meet the basic skill requirements of the job. Statistics indicate that the national percentage of high school graduates attending college has risen from 15% to 56% and that those presently not electing to go to college are less academically qualified than those of earlier decades (Lisack, 1984). Those individuals not attending college but entering the workforce right out of high school tend to have lower academic skills.

According to Henry and Raymond (1982), a survey conducted by the Center for Public Resources indicated that 30% of the secretaries had difficulty reading at the levels required for their jobs, while 50% of the managers and supervisors were unable to write paragraphs free of mechanical error, and 50% of all employees were unable to solve math problems using decimals and fractions.

Students need to realize how important work placement skills are for achieving job satisfaction. Equipping students with interpersonal skills within the educational setting should be a goal of all teachers, as well as the development of teamwork, collaboration, time management skills, and cooperation. These skills will equip students with the knowledge necessary to be successful in modern society and the work force. Today's employers, faced with the economic challenge of succeeding in a competitive world market, have brought to the forefront a new list of skills employees should have to make the transition between school and work (Lankard, 1994). In today's continually changing and challenging environment, educators must seek every opportunity to improve students' achievement, and in particular, students' readiness for and performance in the workplace.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

The students of the targeted vocational class exhibited apathy and unwillingness to be responsible for class work and work placement skills. Evidence for the existence of this problem included teacher observations, work placement skills, surveys of students, employers, and teachers, and checklists. Bored, unengaged students got up in the middle of class and played on the computer; while others worked on other homework or read newspapers. Monaghan (1995) reported incidents of a student challenging a teacher to a fight over a grade and of a student calling her teacher a profanity during class. If students behave like this in a class situation, employers are concerned about how they will behave on the job. The researcher used this analogy in an accounting class, Student: "I forgot my homework at home." Researcher: "Imagine today is payday in our office and I am in charge of cutting your paycheck. It's 3:00 p.m. Friday afternoon and you are ready for the weekend. You come up to my desk where you find me on the phone to my boyfriend and ask for your check. I ignore your first three requests. Finally, disgusted, I reply, 'Oh, gee, I forgot to do your department. It's quitting time. I will do it Monday.' This scenario shows the importance of responsibility and students usually understand the meaning.

Working with others is vital to most businesses. Employers want to hire people who can get along with peers as well as supervisors. Students' lack of civility and tolerance toward one another can be seen as early as elementary school. Students make fun of, jeer at, or are rude to fellow classmates as well as adults. Schools across the country are faced with student-to-student incivility and intolerance (Heinemann, 1996).

In order to document the problem, 2001 work placement skills assessment scores, teacher surveys, student surveys, and employer surveys were reviewed and analyzed concerning students' work preparedness.

Table 1.

Percentage of Student Responses to Student Survey Regarding Work Skills.

	Agree	Disagree	Do Not Know
Saw relevance between S-T-W	75	25	0
Saw themselves as organized	79	21	0
Believed they could manage time	63	38	0
Believed they were responsible	96	4	0

n=24

According to Table 1, students believe they can efficiently manage their time; however, the researcher used an observation checklist and noted late and missing homework assignments. Students felt they used their time wisely, but teacher observation showed they wasted valuable class time. Instead of working on a project students chatted or played around on the computer. The majority of students felt they were organized; yet they often came to class unprepared without books, pens, or pencils. Students felt they

understood the relevance between school to work, and yet their work placement assessment scores did not correlate with this belief. The researcher observed that the students were not putting forth much effort when taking the assessment.

Table 2.

Percentage of Teacher Responses to Teacher Survey Regarding Their Work Skills.

	Agree	Disagree	Do Not Know
Showed relevance between S-T-W	92	8	0
Saw themselves as organized	94	3	3
Believed they could manage time	89	8	3
Encouraged use of assignment notebook	96	4	0

n=36

Teachers believed they were teaching students the relevance between school and work; however, employers and students do not necessarily agree. Teachers said students were organized and used time wisely; yet, students did not know how to organize or use their time to their advantage.

Table 3 compared what teachers felt they taught and what students believed they knew. The researcher discovered that the teachers rated the students higher than the students rated themselves most of the time. However the students rated themselves higher when it came to responsibility. A factor contributing to the deviation could possibly be students' definition of "responsible". Teachers felt students were more flexible than they believed themselves to be. In 2000 the high school went from a 7-class day to a 4-block class day. The students transitioned much better than some of the teachers. In hindsight

the researcher felt some of the questions asked on the survey were susceptible to various interpretations.

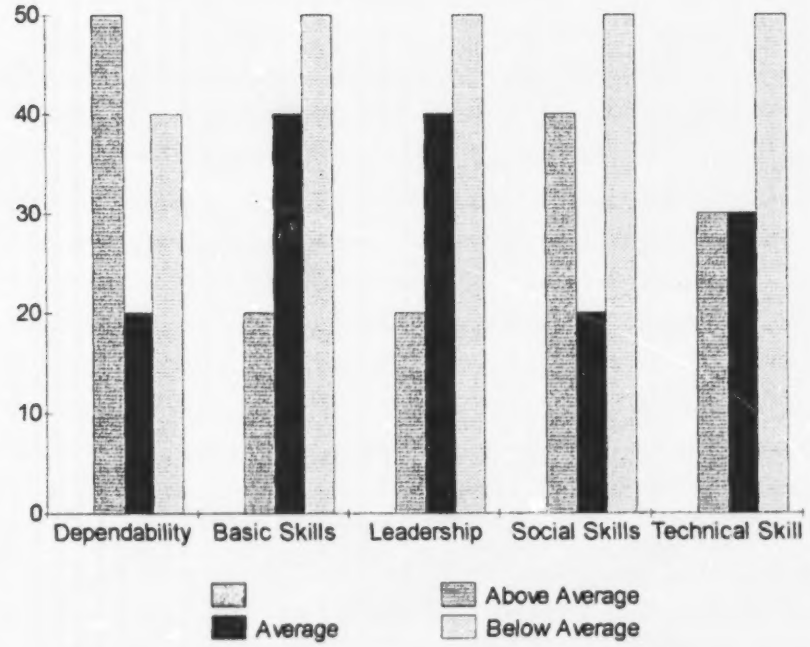
Table 3.

Percentage of Teacher and Student Responses to Survey Regarding Work Skills.

	Teachers	Students	Difference
Believed students are responsible	86	96	-10
Believed students turned HW in on time	79	21	0
Believed students were flexible	63	38	0
Believed students are problem solvers	96	4	0

n=60

Teacher observation checklists verified the students' lack of work ethic. Bored and unable to relate what they are learning in the classroom to posthigh school jobs, the cooperative education students, of the targeted class, viewed academics as pointless and spent much of their time daydreaming about the freedom they would have after graduation and the purchasing power of full-time jobs. Cooperative students viewed their senior year largely as a waste of time.



n=11

Figure 1.

Percentage of Employer Survey Responses to 5 Desirable Employee Traits.

According to Figure 1, over 50% of the employer responses indicated that entry-level employees lacked 4 of the 5 necessary attributes needed for success. Regarding leadership, entry-level employees lacked initiative, use of good judgment, and were not resourceful. Under social skills, these same employees lacked the ability to accept criticism, and had poor attitudes, were not considerate to their peers, and had difficulty in following directions. Technical skills fell short primarily in quantity of work with quality following closely behind. Consequently there is no direct link to how the teachers and students responded to the survey and how the employers responded.

Probable Causes

Educators often speculate about reasons for the lack of academic motivation that afflicts many high school students; however, there is no consensus about the causes. Some major causes of concern have been the lack of relevancy for students between what is learned in school and how that knowledge is applied in the real world. They often do not see the correlation between what is learned in the classroom and what is needed in the world of work. Others see how class content is relevant but do not see the relevancy of the "soft skills" (following rules, attendance, punctuality, and time management). Many students do not fully appreciate the kinds of shifts in skills and knowledge required for today's and tomorrow's workers (Glenn, 2001). New infrastructures are needed to mend the continuing disconnection between what is being taught and assessed in schools and what it takes to be successful in the work place. Only half of the students who begin college will graduate, and of those, only half will find work in their chosen fields (Hoyt 93). The nation's need for highly skilled technical labor has tripled. There is a need for 65% more skilled workers than as recently as ten years ago, and the demand is predicted to continue to rise (Anderson, 1994). Teachers must make adjustments in the way English, science, and arithmetic are taught. Teachers must demonstrate to students the relevance their studies actually have to the workplace and how to transfer those skills. Today's employers want workers who can read and understand technical material. They seek employees with high levels of critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Time has been called one of the scarcest commodities in a person's day. Effective time management is not something that can be implemented overnight. However, taking

charge of one's life and using some form of a calendar, a person can become more efficient and productive.

As Burke (2000) suggested, teachers sometimes do not feel it necessary to teach students social skills or responsibility skills. Interpersonal, decision-making, and problem-solving skills should be integrated into the curriculum, taught, reinforced, and assessed. Schools have standards for improving students' skills in mathematics, English, science, and social studies, but there should also be standards in life skills so that students can become effective in their interactions with others in the workplace, community, and family (Elias, Lantieri, Walberg, & Zins, 1999).

Students are being lost by high stakes testing such as the ACT or the PSAT. All students are required to take high stakes tests regardless of whether they spend the majority of their time devoted to occupational skills or college prep classes. Vocational students should not be assessed the same way as those who are college bound. It is more important for workers to be able to apply basic skills in job performance than to demonstrate those skills on standardized tests. However, Gehring (2000) argued that all high school students, regardless of whether they are college-bound, need to be well-rounded, critical thinkers who can pass tests in the core academic areas before they graduate. To meet the transition between school and work, schools must become places where responsibility is accepted for integrating work-related learning into the curriculum, and teachers need to use methods, materials, and strategies that support this learning. Performance-based assessment is imperative to draw conclusions about competencies learned; student self-evaluation and interactive assessments are also helpful. An interdisciplinary approach is beneficial for students to recognize and practice broader

application of skills than in a single course. Vocational education graduates are usually proficient in the skills in which they are trained, but may have a hard time generalizing these skills to other tasks (Owens & Monthey, 1983).

Students who have a high absenteeism or truancy rate, or excessive tardies sometimes turn in sub-standard work. Students who have a tendency to misbehave sometimes exhibit poor work habits. Schools that tolerate or do little to curb such behavior are not helping students develop needed work habits (Ascher, 1988). These inadequacies may be the cause for poor worker morale and high employee turnover, or may prohibit advancement (Junge, 1983).

This researcher has found the following causes to be true of her students and their lack of managing time. Students are not taught how to effectively manage time and many students do not understand how to prioritize tasks. Some students lack poor study habits. Student empathy and laziness are also contributors. Several of the researcher's students informed her they just do not care about school or work. They do as little as possible to just get by.

CHAPTER 3

Literature Review

This research will track students' use of time management tools and try to improve students' use of time through education and the use of assignment notebooks. Glenn (2001) reported that a small school in Pennsylvania graduated students who did not have the skills needed to succeed in business. This coal mining community also had a lot of light manufacturing companies and small businesses. However, the skills of at least half the community's graduates were not competitive enough to make them employable or successful in postsecondary education. Therefore, to find meaningful work, high school graduates needed to master certain workplace skills (SCANS, 2000). SCANS calls these essentials foundation skills and competencies. Workers use foundation skills to build competencies. There are three main domains of foundation skills: basic skills, thinking skills, and personal qualities.

Basic skills deal with reading, writing, speaking, listening, and knowing arithmetic and mathematical concepts. Thinking skills deal with reasoning, making decisions, thinking creatively, solving problems, seeing things in the mind's eye, and knowing how to learn. Finally, personal qualities deal with responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, integrity, and honesty.

According to Regnier (1994), if teachers want students to become intellectually autonomous and prepared to deal with whatever life has to offer, then teachers must create and foster the intellectual life of students. Otherwise some students may fail and not be able to meet the demands of life after the twelfth grade. Nidds and McGerald (1995) surveyed business leaders of several "Fortune 500" corporations and gathered these results:

1) Students lacked analytical, logical, higher order conceptual, and problem solving skills,
2) Students lacked interpersonal skills as well as leadership skills, and
3) Students coming into today's workforce lacked higher-level thinking skills, the ability to solve problems, and the fundamentals of math, reading, and writing. (p. 22-23).

A majority of new workers lacked initiative, the ability to apply their skills to new problems, and the ability to work in groups. In order to meet the SCANS skills, the Occupational Skills Standards Act was developed. This act helps schools meet the needs of the employer by setting benchmarks for certain occupational skills in various clusters. It provides benchmarks for basic workplace skills and technical training as well as identified related academic skills.

Students and entry-level workers benefit by being able to make better decisions about the training they need to advance their careers; allow workers to communicate more effectively to employers what they know and can do; and improved long-term employability by helping workers move more easily among work roles. The employer benefits by reducing training costs; boosting quality and productivity while creating a

more flexible workforce; improving employee retention; and enlarging the pool of skilled workers (Illinois Occupational Skill Standards 2000).

Teachers should give students real-life homework – personally relevant homework geared toward each child's individual abilities and life situations (Boers, 1995). Students are more likely to retain the skills learned in high school if they are encouraged to use those skills in their everyday lives. Lessons taught in the classroom become more relevant and take on new meaning when students know what they are learning can be immediately applied to the real world. By seeing the relevancy of classroom work, students become more aware of the value of what they are learning, and come to school with a positive attitude. Schools and businesses need to develop a partnership that focuses on employer needs and student skill achievement (Glenn, 2001). The partnership should support the integration of academic and technical learning. Schools should promote SCANS skills for all students while emphasizing basic skills, employability skills, and job search training as part of the curriculum.

One technique to help students attain academic achievement is to have time management skills under control. Getting organized is the single most important thing individuals can do to gain control of their personal and professional lives. Mayer (1999) observed that most people waste almost an hour each day looking for papers that are lost on their desks or in their lockers. Paperwork should be sorted into three piles: a keeper pile for work to be done, a pile of papers that need to be forwarded, and a pile that is no longer useful and can be placed in the recycling bin. According to Harman (2000), individuals should keep a detailed calendar for projects, assignments, tests and quiz dates, and personal information. There are calendars or data organizers for all personality types.

One only has to go to the store to buy a pre-made yearly calendar or use the one on the computer. Others prefer personal data organizers (PDA's) such as Palm Pilots or Handspring Visors. Whatever a person chooses to use, it is important to keep only one calendar, not several competing calendars. The more paper handled, the more likely items will not be completed on due dates, and papers may be lost or forgotten or misplaced.

Students at the targeted school took four block classes a day. Most students were either involved in sports or an after school job. They also had personal and family obligations. There seemed to be no end to the amount of information they were expected to handle. Prioritizing tasks, therefore, became more important for effective time management. Harman (2000) suggested preparing to-do lists to help prevent procrastination, and to serve as constant written reminders of unfinished tasks. Long-term projects should be broken down into manageable tasks that are spread out over a sufficient amount of time so that each part is accomplished by the deadline.

Employers want to hire employees who have mastered the basic academic skills, and who can read and understand technical material. Employees must be able to solve problems and demonstrate teamwork capabilities (Carnevale, Gainer, & Meltzer, 1990). Today's workplace is undergoing continual change. Students upon graduation must be prepared to take their places in a global economy. Both existing and emerging jobs require higher levels of skills to remain competitive. Learning does not end with a high school diploma. All adults should be life-long learners.

A gap existed between employer expectations and awareness of those expectations by both students and educators; therefore, it is important for educators to define expectations about employability and interpersonal competencies and encourage

student exploration of them. Teachers should allow for more student directed education and less teacher directed education, which would allow students to take responsibility for their own learning (Lankard, 1995).

Henry (1982) stated there is a disagreement between business executives and educators about the skills necessary for entry-level jobs. Business executives consider knowledge in mathematics and science as a prerequisite for employment, while some school personnel do not. Most educators believe students are sufficiently prepared in all basic skills except writing, while many corporate executives complain of serious deficiencies in reading, reasoning, speaking or listening, mathematics, and science, as well as writing. While Ascher (1988) contended that for most entry-level work, employers want an employee competent in the basic skills but not necessarily with advanced reading, thinking, and scientific skills. Work-related social skills and habits are just as important to employers as the basic skills. Employers want employees who present themselves well, who are enthusiastic, responsible, cooperative, disciplined, flexible, willing to learn, and who show a general understanding of the workplace and the world of business. Junge (1983) agreed that employers want workers who are quick learners and who have a willingness to adapt and learn.

The problem of teaching soft skills be they social or thinking, directly in an already overwhelming curriculum presented a problem for all teachers. Burke (1995) stated that the diverse learning communities of today had left many educators unprepared to manage such a diverse classroom. Teachers are required to teach more than just content in today's classroom. Fogarty (1997) believed thinking skills should encompass the life skills that thread through all areas of a person's life. These skills ranged from

communication and social skills, to the microskills of thinking and reflection, to the technological skills, to the skills needed for solving arithmetic problems, and for computer programming. Direct instruction of such skill development should advance through stages beginning with novice and ending with expert.

In summary, this researcher saw a strong connection between student apathy and low student work skill test scores. Furthermore, student participation ultimately improved vocational students assessment scores; however, college bound students' assessment scores either remained the same or decreased. Being organized and managing time effectively is not a single ability; it includes categorizing, following routines, task analyzing, sequencing, time managing, and decision-making (Berryhill 1998). All of these skills are interdependent and are learned over a period of time. These techniques provide the foundation for more work place assessment skills to be developed later.

Carns and Carns (1991) revealed research that students are different to the extent that they can control the outcomes of their own learning. However they must want to learn and be able to adapt to change (Fawcett, 1999). Change takes time. Students must make connections between the old role and their new role. Teachers need to continue to direct students to improve their work placement skills and develop better time management. There will become a time when students will feel a large amount of anxiety and want to discontinue learning the new role they must play in the world of work. Students must develop persistence in continuing their efforts.

Possible Solutions

Williamson (1997) emphasized students should use a checklist for each subject. Students should have some form of organizing materials such as pocket folders or 3 ring binders for notes and handouts. Learning how to organize will teach students how to decipher what papers to keep, throw away, or hand in. Color coding notebooks or folders is another way to facilitate locating and organizing materials.

Hatcher and Pond (1998) suggested the use of assignment notebooks or planners to facilitate the organization of material. The researcher gave each student in the vocational class an assignment notebook to help develop better time management skills.

Project Objective:

As a result of using time management skills taught by the vocational teacher during the period of August 2001 through December 2001, the targeted vocational students will increase their organizational skills as measured by activity logs, pretests, posttests, student grades, and teacher observation.

In order to accomplish this objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Design lesson plans that incorporate proper organizational skills.
2. Construct activities to help; students see the relevance between school and work.
3. Design a process for self-assessment of improvement in time management skills.
4. Require that students use an assignment notebook.
5. Daily checklist of required materials at the beginning of each class.

Project Action Plan:

The following action plan was designed to implement the objective described above. The desired improvement as a result of the implementation of this plan was that

students would show an improvement in their use of time management as well as other work place skills.

Activities to be planned include: use of a assignment notebook, student survey, pre and post test, career portfolio, develop lesson plans as well as instructional materials on time management, and observation checklists to be used at the beginning of each class.

Teacher, student, and employer surveys were developed in August of 2001 and the surveys were processed in December of 2001. A pre and posttest were used as a guide to establish baseline data for current use of student time before implementation and then afterward to show if improvement was achieved after implementation was developed in the fall of 2001.

1. August – Letter of consent sent to parents of minors
2. August – Employer Survey sent to local businesses and Fortune 500 businesses
3. August – Student and Teacher surveys will be distributed
4. September – All surveys will be tallied and tabulated
5. September – Pretest will be given to targeted students
6. September – Direct instruction in organization skills will be given to targeted students.
7. September – Students will begin to use a student planner.
8. October – Students will complete an activity log for one week.
9. October – Students will self-assess their time management skills.
10. November – Students will create a portfolio to show the relevancy between school and work.
11. November – Students will take the workplace skills assessment.

12. December – Posttest will be administered to targeted students to assess improvement in time management skills.

13. December – Students will do a final self-assessment to show improvement in their use of time.

Methods of Assessment:

In order to determine the effects of the intervention, anecdotal records and checklists will be kept on preparedness for missing work and assignment due dates. This information will be obtained from the checklists developed by the teacher. A pretest will be administered to gather baseline data on how students currently view their effective use of time. A posttest will be administered at the end of the research project to determine if students improved their understanding and their use of proper time management skills. Students will keep an activity log for one week to determine how they spend their time. Students will be required to use student planners for Terms 1 and 2 to keep track of homework assignments and their due dates. Students will also prepare a career portfolio to organize and maintain necessary records for obtaining employment on the completion of high school. Finally, students will do a self-assessment to see how they are really managing their time.

CHAPTER 4

Project Results

Historical Description of the Intervention

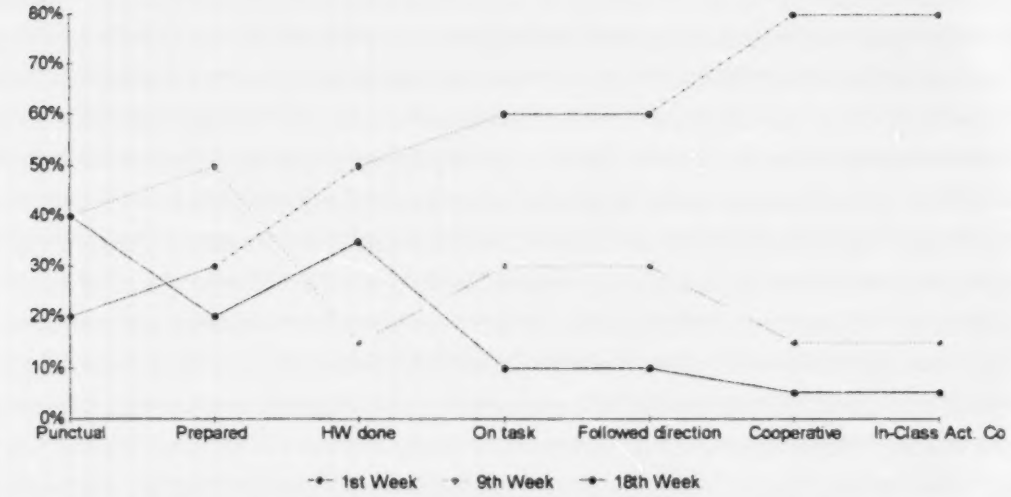
The objective of this project was to increase students' use of time and improve work placement skills. The action plan targeted seniors in a vocational cooperative class during Terms 1 and 2 of the 2001-2002 school year. The researcher used lessons regarding how to better organize the student's valuable time as well as lessons on improving the soft skills discussed in Chapter 3. Some methods discussed included establishing classroom guidelines, asking higher order thinking questions, cooperative learning (learning how to work well with others), how to schedule blocks of time and how to prioritize daily events. Each senior developed a career portfolio to showcase the work skills they had acquired and which helped the students organize employment documents.

During the summer prior to the school year, the researcher developed lesson plans to address work skills and how to improve time management skills. The Internet was used. Instructional activities and materials were created to engage students in the learning process. Assignment notebooks or day planners were purchased for each student in the class to provide the means to prioritize tasks as well as keep track of daily tasks. Instructions were given to students on what to write in the daily planners and various

ways to prioritize tasks. A variety of assessment tools including the career portfolio, time log, teacher observation checklists, work placement skills assessment, and other student performance tasks were incorporated into the action research plan. An effort was made each day during Terms 1 and 2 to connect the importance of time management with the students' lives. Surveys were sent out to 25 employers at the beginning of the project and returned surveys were tallied at the end of the project. A similar process was conducted regarding a teacher survey and a student survey. A pretest was administered at the beginning of the project and a posttest was administered at the end of the project. During the project students kept an activity log of how they spend their time, used a daily planner, and created a career portfolio.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to evaluate the effect of the action plan on student's behavior, a teacher observation checklist was used to keep track of student behavior (Appendix D). The researcher recorded the number of students who did not bring necessary materials to class, turned in late assignments, arrived late to class, were cooperative, completed the in-class activity, and stayed on task on a daily basis and were averaged for the week.



n=22

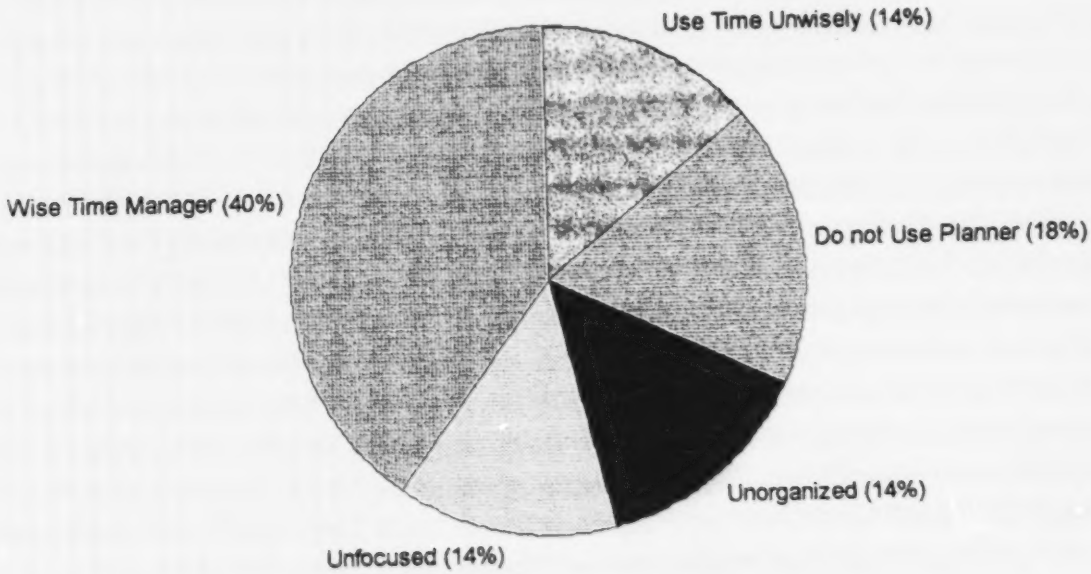
Figure 2.

Post results of Teacher Observation Checklist on Student Behavior.

Figure 2 shows at the end of the intervention more students were arriving to class on time but they were coming unprepared. Before the intervention, more students had their homework completed on time and remained on task. However, those numbers started to slide during the 18 weeks. Homework was at an all time low during the ninth week of the intervention but had started to rise again by the eighteenth week. The researcher believed the reason for the high marks the first week was due to the start of school and students being interested. The seniors of the targeted vocational class lost interest in school as the year progressed. They saw little need to be doing the assigned activities or any value in the activities. The targeted students saw little value in attending classes. The prevalent attitude was "I'm a senior. I shouldn't have to do any work."

Before the intervention was administered, the researcher gave the students a pretest (see Figure 3) Appendix F. At the end of the intervention a posttest was

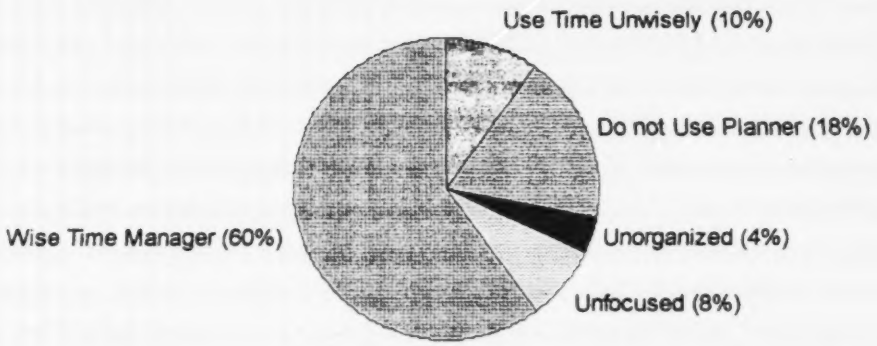
administered (see Figure 4) Appendix G. Baseline data were gathered over an eighteen-week period.



n=22

Figure 3.

Pretest Student Results on Time Management.



n=22

Figure 4.

Posttest Student Results on Time Management.

The results were curious. Students knew they should use an assignment notebook and manage time better; however, they chose not to. There was little increase at the end of the eighteen weeks after the intervention was completed. The interventions apparently had little impact on student behavior. Many students still arrived late to class and were not prepared for the daily lesson. Homework was still turned in after the due date and several students only used an assignment notebook when specifically asked. Targeted students in the vocational class were asked to use an assignment notebook. A summary of the results is shown in Figure 4. More students did not use the assignment notebook even though it was in their possession and they brought it to class.

Table 4.

Workplace Skills Assessment Student Results

	Local School	Tri-County	State
Average Score	51	56	51
Lowest Score	20	29	1
Highest Score	86	79	93
Number Tested	44	157	43,788
Number Passing	19	95	20,233
Passing Rate	44%	61%	46%

n=44

Every year the targeted school assesses all vocational seniors with the Workplace Skills Assessment. The assessment measures students' knowledge of essential skills related to success in the workplace. The test assessed knowledge and skills in six areas: (1) communication, (2) adapting and coping with change, (3) problem-solving and critical thinking, (4) work ethics, (5) technological literacy, and (6) teamwork. Table 4 shows the results from the 2001 assessment. The targeted students' scores were lower than those assessed in 2000. In order to meet the state standard a student must achieve a score of at least 54, and is described as able to obtain and maintain employment. The students at the targeted school who received overall scores lower than 54 did not meet this standard. The targeted school averaged 51. The targeted school's passing rate was lower than both the tri-county region and state passing rates. The low-test scores could be the result of student apathy and unwillingness to take this assessment serious.

Conclusions and Recommendations

For the action research project, the researcher recommends direct instruction to teach study skills, how to manage time effectively, and use of assignment notebooks. At the senior high level, it does not appear to have lasting results probably because students are already set in their ways and it too often seems easier to keep doing things the way they have always been done. Some students fear change and the unknown. Many students start out zealously with the new method but once the newness wears off they may revert to their old ways when anxiety sets in. Change requires time. It requires more than just eighteen weeks to see a remarkable difference. Ideally, to properly use time to the students' advantage, time management should be taught in the elementary classes and stressed through the twelfth grade. Once a good habit is developed at a young age it is easier to maintain and keep using that good habit throughout adulthood. It is always easier to learn something right the first time than it is to unlearn a bad habit.

The daily checklist for preparedness is important because the students benefit from knowing that organizational skills must be practiced on an ongoing basis. However, the researcher found later in looking over the assignments, that some students had not turned in any homework nor had they written the assignments in the assignment notebook. It became necessary to ask students daily to take out the assignment notebook and write down the information. It was interesting to note the number of students who did not consider the use of the assignment notebook as an important aspect of preparedness.

Analyzing the various data from the action plan suggest that portions of the plan were successful and others were not as successful. For example, the researcher observed that students knew it was important to using the assignment notebook and yet they did not

consistently use it. The researcher was disappointed that students did not implement what they understoond is beneficial to them. The failure of the plan to improve student work placement skills assessments could also be attributed to this particular senior class. Next year the seniors may be more studious about taking the assessment. Possible changes to the action plan could be to increase student awareness of the importance of work placement skills at a younger level such as the freshmen class. As students advance in school so could the implementation of incorporating work placement skills in other content areas. Other options may be to focus on other soft skills besides time management and to expand on the students work skills knowledge as well as expanding other teachers' awareness of the importance of work placement skills.

Due to Internet and technological difficulties, the Internet project took longer than expected and may have not had the intended impact due to student frustrations. More Internet activities should be incorporated in the future. Technology should not be forsaken just because of computer glitches or server failure.

The strategies used should be considered active rather than passive. Students must become actively involved in their pursuit of acquiring workplace skills. Students need to master critical thinking skills and be empowered to transfer obtained knowledge to real life situations. They cannot sit idly by and try to absorb these skills through osmosis. Without going after these skills, one will not be able to attain them. Can students acquire a job without these skills? Of course they can. Will they be effective employees? They may or may not be. However one thing is clear, people who possess these skills achieve greater job success.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Employer Survey

Please rank entry-level employees on the following items

Excellent		**Average**				**Below Average**
5	4	3		2		1
Dependability						
Reliability		5	4	3	2	1
Promptness		5	4	3	2	1
Attendance		5	4	3	2	1
Honesty		5	4	3	2	1
Basic Skills						
Reading		5	4	3	2	1
Writing		5	4	3	2	1
Math		5	4	3	2	1
Oral Communication		5	4	3	2	1
Leadership						
Ability to work unsupervised		5	4	3	2	1
Takes initiative		5	4	3	2	1
Uses good judgment		5	4	3	2	1
Resourceful		5	4	3	2	1
Social Skills						
Ability to work w/others		5	4	3	2	1
Accepts criticism		5	4	3	2	1
Attitude		5	4	3	2	1
Considerate to peers		5	4	3	2	1
Follows directions		5	4	3	2	1
Technical Skills						
Quality of work		5	4	3	2	1
Quantity of work		5	4	3	2	1
Competency		5	4	3	2	1
Acquired job skills		5	4	3	2	1

Additional Comments

Appendix B

Student Survey

Please rank the following items

Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	4	3	2	1

1. I am a responsible person.	5	4	3	2	1
2. My homework is completed in a timely fashion.	5	4	3	2	1
3. I am an honest and trustworthy person.	5	4	3	2	1
4. I easily adapt to change.	5	4	3	2	1
5. I am a good problem solver.	5	4	3	2	1
6. School attendance is important to me.	5	4	3	2	1
7. I am comfortable talking in front of others.	5	4	3	2	1
8. I get along with others.	5	4	3	2	1
9. I can work unsupervised.	5	4	3	2	1
10. I often take the initiative.	5	4	3	2	1
11. I am an organized person.	5	4	3	2	1
12. I am a resourceful person.	5	4	3	2	1
13. I follow classroom rules at all times.	5	4	3	2	1
14. I accept criticism.	5	4	3	2	1
15. I can efficiently manage my time.	5	4	3	2	1
16. I am considerate of others.	5	4	3	2	1
17. I can follows directions.	5	4	3	2	1
18. I take pride in the quality of my work.	5	4	3	2	1
19. I see the need to follow rules.	5	4	3	2	1
20. I see the relevance between school and work.	5	4	3	2	1

Appendix C

Teacher Survey

Please rank the following items

Strongly Agree 5	**Agree** 4	**Don't Know** 3	**Disagree** 2	**Strongly Disagree** 1

1. The majority of my students are responsible.	5	4	3	2	1
2. Homework is turned in on time.	5	4	3	2	1
3. I encourage students to use an assignment notebook.	5	4	3	2	1
4. I believe students are flexible.	5	4	3	2	1
5. I believe students are problem solvers.	5	4	3	2	1
6. I stress the importance of good attendance.	5	4	3	2	1
7. I have students do oral presentations.	5	4	3	2	1.
8. I accept late work with consequences.	5	4	3	2	1
9. I accept late work without consequences.	5	4	3	2	1
10. I accept late work for partial credit.	5	4	3	2	1
11. I am an organized person.	5	4	3	2	1
12. I help students manage their time.	5	4	3	2	1
13. I stress the importance of rules.	5	4	3	2	1
14. I show the relevance between school and work.	5	4	3	2	1
15. I can efficiently manage my time.	5	4	3	2	1

Appendix D

Teacher Observation Checklist **Date _____**

	☺	😐	☹
Punctual to class			
Prepared for class			
Homework Assignment completed			
On task			
Followed directions			
Were cooperative			
In Class Activity completed			

Teacher comments:

Teacher Observation Checklist **Date _____**

	☺	😐	☹
Punctual to class			
Prepared for class			
Homework Assignment completed			
On task			
Followed directions			
Were cooperative			
In Class Activity completed			

Teacher comments:

Appendix E

Time Management Pretest

What kind of time manager are you?

Respond to these statements to see how well you manage your time.

	Yes	No
1. I think daily planning guides are a waste of time	____	____
2. My academic goals are pretty clear to me	____	____
3. Leaving assignments until the last minute is a big problem for me	____	____
4. I organize my time very well	____	____
5. I wish I were more motivated	____	____
6. It's easy for me to cut short visits with people who drop by when I am studying	____	____
7. Visitors should feel free to see me whenever they want. ____	____	
8. I know which activities in my life are important to focus on and which ones aren't	____	____
9. I am a perfectionist in everything I do	____	____
10. I have enough time to pursue leisure activities	____	____

Scoring:

Odd-numbered statements, **1 point** for each **YES**
Even-numbered statements, **1 point** for each **NO**

If your score is:

1 - 2 - You are probably on top of things but can still improve.
3 - 4—You are treading water.
5 - 7 - Managing your time well is a problem!
8 - 10 - You are on the verge of chaos!!

Appendix F

Time Management Postest

What kind of time manager are you?

Respond to these statements to see how well you manage your time.

	Yes	No
1. I think daily planning guides are a waste of time	____	____
2. My academic goals are pretty clear to me	____	____
4. Leaving assignments until the last minute is a big problem for me	____	____
4. I organize my time very well	____	____
5. I wish I were more motivated	____	____
7. It's easy for me to cut short visits with people who drop by when I am studying	____	____
7. Visitors should feel free to see me whenever they want.	____	____
8. I know which activities in my life are important to focus on and which ones aren't	____	____
9. I am a perfectionist in everything I do	____	____
10. I have enough time to pursue leisure activities	____	____

Scoring:

Odd-numbered statements, **1 point** for each **YES**
Even-numbered statements, **1 point** for each **NO**

If your score is:

1 - 2 - You are probably on top of things but can still improve.
3 - 4—You are treading water.
5 - 7 - Managing your time well is a problem!
8 - 10 - You are on the verge of chaos!! Revisit internet sites and review material.

Appendix G

Name _____
Date _____

Self-Assessment Time Management

1. I used my time wisely today.	☺	☹
2. I used my daily planner today.	☺	☹
3. I turned assignments in on time.	☺	☹
4. I encouraged others to use time wisely today.	☺	☹
5. I did not procrastinate today.	☺	☹
6. I had time for myself today.	☺	☹
7. I did not accomplish a priority today.	☺	☹

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